

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru / National Assembly for Wales

Pwyllgor yr Economi, Seilwaith a Sgiliau/ Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee

Prentisiaethau yng Nghymru 2017 / Apprenticeships in Wales 2017

Ymateb gan Comisiynydd Pobl Hŷn Cymru / Evidence from the Older People's Commissioner for Wales

About the Commissioner

The Older People's Commissioner for Wales is an independent voice and champion for older people across Wales, standing up and speaking out on their behalf. She works to ensure that those who are vulnerable and at risk are kept safe and ensures that all older people have a voice that is heard, that they have choice and control, that they don't feel isolated or discriminated against and that they receive the support and services they need. The Commissioner's work is driven by what older people say matters most to them and their voices are at the heart of all that she does. The Commissioner works to make Wales a good place to grow older - not just for some but for everyone.

The Older People's Commissioner for Wales:

- Promotes awareness of the rights and interests of older people in Wales.
- Challenges discrimination against older people in Wales.
- Encourages best practice in the treatment of older people in Wales.
- Reviews the law affecting the interests of older people in Wales.

National Assembly for Wales Inquiry into Apprenticeships in Wales 2017

1. As the Older People's Commissioner for Wales I welcome the opportunity to respond to the National Assembly for Wales' Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee Inquiry into Apprenticeships in Wales 2017¹. I was pleased to have the opportunity to contribute to the 2015 Inquiry undertaken by the previous Assembly on Employment Opportunities for People Over 50. Opportunities for learning and employment for older people is an issue that historically has not been recognised and received sufficient focus, and for this reason it is a priority theme within Ageing Well in Wales, the national partnership programme to improve the health and wellbeing of people aged 50+ in Wales, which I host and chair².
2. I welcome this Inquiry as apprenticeship opportunities for older people are important and can be a 'gateway' back into employment for older people. I am clear that the knowledge, skills and experience that older people possess in Wales is currently under-appreciated and apprenticeships could be a crucial and attractive option for the estimated 205,000 people aged 50-64 who are not in education, employment or training (NEETs)³. This has a significant impact on their health, wellbeing and financial security and intensifies the need for wider public services support.
3. I welcome the Welsh Government commitment to create a minimum of 100,000 high quality all age apprenticeships. I want to ensure that this commitment is fully inclusive of older people and provides them with every help and support to access apprenticeships⁴. The traditional retirement model is no longer relevant and an increasing number of older people want, or need to, remain in or return to employment. Having the right skills or changing careers in order to accommodate caring responsibilities for example is crucial and apprenticeships can be an important

¹ <http://www.senedd.assembly.wales/mgConsultationDisplay.aspx?ID=257>

² <http://www.ageingwellinwales.com/en/home>

³ http://www.olderpeoplewales.com/Libraries/Consultation_Responses_2016/September_2016_NAfW_Economy_Infrastructure_and_Skills_Committee_ENGLISH.sflb.ashx

⁴ <http://gov.wales/docs/strategies/160920-taking-wales-forward-en.pdf>

‘stepping stone’ to get older workers or jobseekers into new employment opportunities whilst earning and learning.

4. The 2015 Inquiry on Employment Opportunities for People Over 50 provided much needed momentum and highlighted an issue that has been long overlooked: Wales has a huge potential workforce of older people that are currently under-valued and under-utilised, and much more needs to be done to address the key barriers to employment, including ageism, addressing outdated skillsets and move towards age-friendly workplaces and flexible working models that are considerate of older people’s needs and circumstances⁵.
5. The 2015 Inquiry report includes a section on apprenticeships and highlights some of the key issues regarding older apprentices: the numbers of those aged 50+ taking part in apprenticeships were “disproportionately smaller than the numbers of those who were looking for work...women are twice as likely to be on an apprenticeship of a higher level”, and also whether there are sufficient opportunities for older people to access apprenticeships at different levels and in a wide and diverse range of sectors.
6. The National Assembly Inquiry in 2015 has led to some positive developments in terms of addressing employment opportunities for older people, including Welsh Government commissioned research on the specific barriers to employment, the all-age Welsh Government employability programme and the Welsh Government ‘Age of Investment’ campaign to tackle ageism in the workplace and engage with employers across Wales to promote the benefits of employing an age-diverse workforce. This is welcomed, however this is only a beginning in addressing the employment issues facing older people, the key barriers to employment and the subsequent detrimental impact on individuals and economies.

Welsh Government Aligning the Apprenticeship model to the needs of the Welsh economy

7. The Welsh Government Apprenticeship Skills Policy Plan, published in February 2017, provides some structure and clarity on

⁵ <http://www.assembly.wales/laid%20documents/cr-ld10305/cr-ld10305-e.pdf>

how the Welsh Government will achieve 100,000 apprenticeship places over the next five years⁶. I welcome the recognition that the working population is ageing and that older people face specific barriers when trying to re-enter the labour market and the role of people aged 50+ have in mentoring younger workers and passing on their skills and knowledge.

8. The development of a new master craft person programme is positive and it will be interesting to see whether this approach, already in place in many European countries⁷, encourages an increasing number of older people to access apprenticeships and helps to boost their skills. I also welcome the recognition that apprenticeships in Wales welcomes diversity, and I support all efforts to ensure that older women, older disabled people, and older people from ethnic minority groups are provided with opportunities to access apprenticeships in a wide and diverse range of sectors. The commitment to improve engagement actions with under-represented and/or protected groups is welcomed and should be regularly monitored and reviewed.
9. Moving forward, I would welcome further detail on how the Welsh Government will address apprenticeship opportunities for older people, including the delivery priorities of addressing skills shortages, developing higher level skills and skills pathways, and across the 120 apprenticeship frameworks on offer in Wales. Despite the emphasis on all-age, the new plan is focused on the 16-24 age group and more information is required on access to apprenticeships for other age groups.
10. I would be interested, for example, in how the Welsh Government intends to engage with older people who have never considered apprenticeships before. This would involve not only targeted marketing and challenging some of the myths and misconceptions around apprenticeships i.e. confined to younger people, but also pop-up information sessions, awareness raising classes etc. in places and venues suitable for older people, similar

⁶ <http://gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/170206-app-policy-plan-en-v2.pdf>

⁷ <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news-and-press/news/germany-becoming-master-craftsman-government-support>

to the provision on offer in schools and colleges for younger people. I would also be interested in how the Welsh Government intends to engage with employers of all sizes and sectors in Wales to promote the benefits of introducing apprenticeships to older people and encourage the development of age-diverse workforces.

11. The Welsh Government Strategy for Older People 2013-23⁸, which does not refer to apprenticeships, included a commitment to develop an Older People's Skills Strategy. I have previously emphasised that not publishing this strategy and the possibility of diluting older people's skills needs via an all-age approach is a missed opportunity. Further details are also needed on how the Welsh Government investment of over £126m in apprenticeships over 2017-18 is helping older people⁹.

12. In the context of the Welsh Government Framework for Co-investment in Skills¹⁰, the National Assembly Inquiry Report highlights that support is provided to older workers during the transition phase up to April 2017. I would welcome clarification on how the specific skillsets and needs of older people are addressed beyond this date. Furthermore, I would welcome further information on targets within the 100,000 all-age commitment: how many apprenticeships for older people does the Welsh Government constitute as success?

Perception of apprenticeships amongst older people

13. The National Assembly Inquiry report in 2015 makes the key point that whilst the Welsh Government focus on apprenticeships is for young people aged 16-24, this has had an adverse impact on the employment and training prospects of people aged 50+. This point is crucial: it is right that younger people are given every help and support to access apprenticeships, however I expect that older people are provided with equality of opportunity and are given similar levels of help and support to take up apprenticeships opportunities. All-age apprenticeships must mean exactly that.

⁸ <http://gov.wales/docs/dhss/publications/130521olderpeoplestrategyen.pdf>

⁹ <http://gov.wales/about/cabinet/cabinetstatements/2017/apprenticeship/?lang=en>

¹⁰ <http://gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/141120-framework-for-co-investment-in-skills-en.pdf>

14. A key barrier to apprenticeships for older people is perception: the language and imagery around apprenticeships is very much focused on younger people and suggests that such opportunities are not an option for older people who want or need to improve their skillsets, explore different career pathways and strengthen their prospects of remaining in or returning to employment. The result is low take-up: at the UK level, only 11.3% of those starting an apprenticeship in 2015/16 were aged between 45-59 years, while less than 1% were aged 60+¹¹.
15. Improving older people's access to apprenticeships is a priority within the Ageing Well in Wales Phase Two Action Plan¹², and I have engaged with the Welsh Government to discuss the need to change perceptions and demonstrate to older people across Wales that apprenticeships are an option. This was partly addressed during Apprenticeship Week Cymru in March 2017 however more work, awareness raising and targeted marketing is needed to change the language and imagery around apprenticeships to make it more inclusive for people of all ages¹³. The absence of older people in the Welsh Government individuals brochure and leaflet on apprenticeships, for example, is notable¹⁴¹⁵.

Good practice and adopting new models and approaches

16. Learning from good practice is always helpful, and apprenticeships for older people in Wales can learn from schemes and initiatives elsewhere. For example, National Express and Barclays Bank have launched a mature apprenticeship scheme, giving older workers a chance at a new career. More than a third of those recruited at Barclays are aged 50+. To date, the Co-operative has taken on nearly 400 apprentices aged 50-59, with the oldest 67 years old¹⁶. Germany has long been recognised as

¹¹ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/2017/02/03/apprenticeships-over-50s-older-workers-will-stay-jobs-longer/>

¹² <http://www.ageingwellinwales.com/en/news/articles/13-10-2016/Ageing-Well-in-Wales-Phase-2-Action-Plan>

¹³ <https://twitter.com/AgeingWellCymru/status/839885194354122758>

¹⁴ <http://gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/160825-apprenticeships-brochure-2017-en.pdf>

¹⁵ <http://gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/skillsandtraining/apprenticeships/?lang=en>

¹⁶ <http://www.ageingwellinwales.com/Libraries/Documents/BITC---Age-in-the-Workplace.pdf>

an exemplar country in recruiting and retaining older workers by offering a range of opportunities to improve and update skillsets via apprenticeships and vocational training¹⁷.

17. A number of reports and studies can help employers of all sizes in Wales to consider employing older people and promote the benefits of an age-diverse and multi-generational workplace. For example, the Business in the Community 'Age in the Workplace' report recommends the introduction of age-neutral apprenticeships to create opportunities for older workers to find work and improve skillsets¹⁸. The DWP 'Fuller Working Lives' report encourages employers to consider hiring or rehiring older workers through initiatives such as apprenticeships for older workers¹⁹.

18. The 'A New Vision for Older Workers: Retain, Retrain, Recruit' report prepared by Dr Ros Altmann, former Business Champion for Older Workers, recommends Government funding for mature apprenticeships, particularly for those wanting to return to work after caring, or needing to change career²⁰. The funding issue is crucial: employers are funded by Government to offer apprenticeships to young people, however for those aged 25 years and older there are fewer financial incentives to introduce apprenticeships and train and upskill older workers.

19. The introduction of the UK Apprenticeship Levy in April 2017 is an important development. It should encourage employers to review their apprenticeships, training and skills development policies, however I note Welsh Government concerns regarding the Levy and how it complements the different approach to apprenticeships in Wales²¹. I agree with the Committee's recent report on the Apprenticeship Levy that all Levy-paying employers in Wales have the information they need during the introductory period in order to ensure clarity and stability, and that the Welsh Government clearly sets out how it intends to promote and

¹⁷ <https://www.ft.com/content/7678f538-883e-11e3-8afa-00144feab7de>

¹⁸ <http://www.ageingwellinwales.com/Libraries/Documents/BITC---Age-in-the-Workplace.pdf>

¹⁹ <http://www.ageingwellinwales.com/Libraries/Documents/Fuller-Working-Lives.pdf>

²⁰ <http://www.ageingwellinwales.com/Libraries/Documents/A-New-Vision-for-Older-Workers.pdf>

²¹ <http://gov.wales/about/cabinet/cabinetstatements/2017/apprenticeship/?lang=en>

improve the take-up of apprenticeships among both levy and non-levy paying employers in Wales, opportunities that should include older workers and jobseekers²².

Personal development and addressing skillsets

20. The importance of apprenticeships in developing ‘soft skills’ should not be underestimated. For older jobseekers, being rejected for numerous job applications can have a huge impact on their mental health and wellbeing, particularly those who have experienced compulsory redundancy or a long-term illness. Apprenticeships can help strengthen older people’s confidence, improve language skills, familiarise older people with the workplace once again, and provide older people with a social network in addition to potential employment. Apprenticeships can also help bridge the generations, encourage workers of different ages to exchange skills and help tackle the myths and misconceptions around older workers.
21. The 2015 National Assembly Employment Inquiry report highlighted that older workers will benefit from access to all-age support for Higher Level Apprenticeships i.e. those at Level 4 and above. However, the majority of apprentices are at Level 2 (Foundation Apprenticeship, 45%) and 3 (Apprenticeship, 39%)²³. The report also mentions that there are 46 apprenticeship frameworks available at Level 4 and above, including accounting, logistics, creative media and advanced manufacturing.
22. In order to recognise qualifications and different experiences, older people need to access apprenticeships at different levels, not just Level 4, and require access to apprenticeships in a wide and diverse range of sectors. Creative media and accounting, for example, might not be relevant for an older person with limited or outdated digital skills, and advanced manufacturing might not be appropriate for an older individual with physical health issues. The apprenticeship needs of older women are not confined to health and social care. The diversity of apprenticeships on offer is

²² <http://www.assembly.wales/laid%20documents/cr-ld10999/cr-ld10999-e.pdf>

²³ <http://gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/170206-app-policy-plan-en-v2.pdf>

therefore crucial in order to complement skillsets and provide older people with the confidence to pursue apprenticeships.

Conclusion

23. With an ageing workforce, Wales needs to maximise the potential of older people and provide them with every help, support and opportunity to remain in or return to employment. New and innovative models are required: over the next ten years, there will be an estimated 13.5 million job vacancies in the UK, however only 7 million young people will leave education in that time²⁴. Addressing the skills needs of older workers, introducing mid-life career reviews and flexible working patterns is therefore crucial²⁵.
24. Improving the employment prospects of older people benefits everyone: it helps the financial resilience of the individual by supporting incomes in later life, it can improve their physical and mental health and wellbeing, it boosts the workforce and the productivity of employers, and it strengthens local and national economies. Furthermore, employing older workers means an age-diverse workforce and enables them to share and pass on their skills and experience to younger workers, receiving new skills from younger colleagues in return.
25. For the reasons outlined above, not enough older people are accessing apprenticeship opportunities in Wales, and further work is needed to engage with older jobseekers and maximise the potential of this under-utilised age group. Apprenticeships must be seen as an open, inclusive and attractive option for older workers and jobseekers, providing them with opportunities to strengthen skillsets, change career pathways, address financial resilience and complement their needs and circumstances in later life. The need for targeted marketing and a shift in language and imagery to accommodate older people is crucial.
26. Access to apprenticeships are vital for older people if they are to remain in and return to the workforce, and ensuring that older people are able to do this will be a key element of Wales'

²⁴ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/goodlife/living/apprenticeships-arent-just-for-the-young/>

²⁵ <http://www.hrmagazine.co.uk/article-details/the-benefits-of-employing-older-apprentices>

overall economic success over the coming years. The Welsh Government intent on all-age apprenticeships is welcomed, however this intent must be matched by reality which ultimately will be judged by the number of older people who take up apprenticeships in Wales.

27. I look forward to working with the Welsh Government and other key partners to improve access to apprenticeships and equality of opportunity for older people, to help change older people's perceptions of apprenticeships, to broaden the diversity of apprenticeships on offer, and ultimately to ensure that apprenticeships lead on to learning and employment opportunities that help improve the health, wellbeing and quality of life of older people across Wales.